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Assassin Scare Diverted Jet Bringing Sadat to U.S.

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A jetliner bringing Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Washington last weekend changed plans to refuel at an airfield in the Azores Islands because of a report that assassins were waiting to kill Sadat, Carter administration sources said yesterday.

Instead of landing at the Portuguese-owned Lajes airfield, where Libyan assassins reportedly waited with missiles, Sadat's plane from Cairo was diverted to Mildenhall Air Base, a British field north of London, the sources said. They refused to be named.

The existence of the report about the assassination team was confirmed by U.S. intelligence sources as well as those of a Middle East nation. The report was picked up separately by the two intelligence services, although it may have originated from the same source.

The account of what happened was first reported yesterday by Cox Newspapers.

The intelligence sources said they had no confirmation of whether the plot was genuine. Some of the sources thought the threat was real and others said it may have been planted. There were no arrests.

But as a precaution, Sadat's Air Egypt Boeing 707 was sent instead to England. He was headed for Washington to meet with President Carter for two days of talks in a bid by Carter to get the stalled Palestinian autonomy talks between Egypt and Israel back on track.

According to the report, the assassination plot involved SAM 7 ground-to-air, heat-seeking missiles that can be carried and fired by one person. The missiles could have been used to shoot down the plane.

Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi and Sadat are longstanding enemies. The Libyan leader has publicly said in the past that Sadat should be killed and there have been unconfirmed reports in the past that Qaddafi had backed assassination plots against Sadat. Qaddafi claims that Sadat is a traitor to Arabs because of Sadat's friendliness toward Israel.

In recent years, since the use of the SAMs has become widespread, there have been recurring reports in Europe that the missiles would be used by terrorist groups to shoot down planes. But as yet, there have been no such attacks in Europe.